

Spirit Unites Team, Quorum Members

By Richard M. Romney

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One of the great stories coming out of Africa this summer is about football. But it's not about the World Cup.

Top football teams from all over the world are playing in South Africa this month, hoping to win the World Cup. Teammates will depend on each other, their coaches, and their fans to get them through to the finals. Among players and fans from each country, team spirit is so palpable you can feel it in the air.

But no team's members will be more loyal to each other, their coaches, and their fans than the priests quorum of the Kagiso Ward, Soweto South Africa Stake, even though they won't be playing for the World Cup. A little over a year ago, five of these young men were introduced to the Church by their

football coach, who is himself a recent convert. Now they are at the heart of another "team"—their priests quorum—and working with another "coach"—their bishop—as they live the gospel day by day and prepare to serve as full-time missionaries.

Coach Solomon Was Wise

Like many people in South Africa, 29-year-old Solomon Eliya Tumane loves football. He spends tireless hours each week coaching the Hurricanes Football Club. He loves his players and rejoices in their successes. They love and respect him in return. So when Coach Solomon joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, his players were curious.

"He would come to practice straight from his institute class," says Siyabulela Manyakanyaka, 17, who goes by "McDonald." "We could see the scriptures and Church magazines in his bag, so we started asking questions, and to answer, he would read to us," says Thapelo Benjamin Sesinyi, 17.

"I was eager to teach these young ones because I love them so much," Coach Solomon says. "I want them to go in the right path. I told one of them, 'You would do well if you read the scriptures,' so they all started reading the scriptures. They enjoyed it, so then I taught them about prayer. Then one day they surprised me. I got to practice early, and I was taking a nap when they woke me and said, 'Coach, we need to visit your church.' That was a day I will never forget, because I knew then that they were on the right path."

With Approval

But the coach wouldn't go further without parental approval. He went to each player's home, one at a time, to ask if it was all right to invite the players to church. The parents agreed. "We came to church three weeks in a row," Thapelo



Teammates Siyabulela "McDonald" Manyakanyaka, Thapelo Sesinyi, Emmanuel Pebe, and Lawrence Tsetse joined the Church in part because of the example of their coach, Solomon Tumane (center).

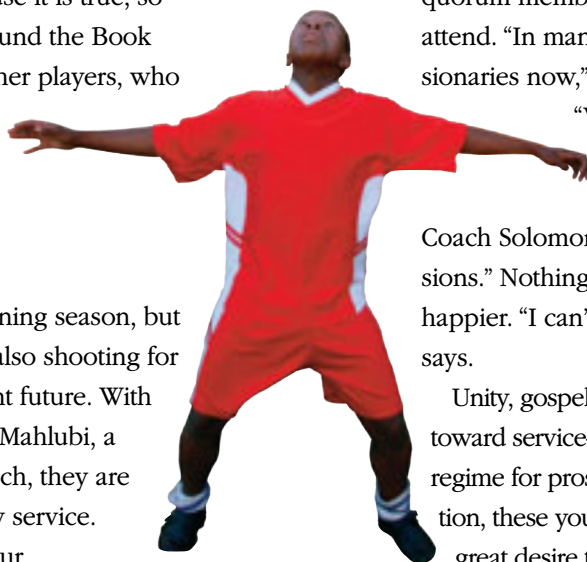
remembers. “We wanted to learn more and more.” So the coach again asked parents for permission, this time for the players to study with the full-time missionaries. Again the parents agreed.

“The missionaries gave us each a copy of the Book of Mormon,” McDonald says. “They told us to read it and pray about it because it is true, so we did. I prayed and read and found the Book of Mormon to be true.” So did other players, who were then baptized and confirmed. Five of the team members are now Latter-day Saints.

Gospel Goals

Most teams set goals for a winning season, but these five young Hurricanes are also shooting for another goal in the not-too-distant future. With the guidance of Bishop Bongani Mahlubi, a man they consider a spiritual coach, they are preparing for full-time missionary service.

“They are a great strength in our ward,” the bishop says. “And they are part of that great priesthood team of Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood holders all over the world. These young men do everything together—they walk to school together, play



football together, go to seminary together, and serve in the priesthood together. If I call one young man to ask if he can help, I get all five.” McDonald says the priests quorum also studies regularly from *Preach My Gospel*, and Thapelo says that in addition to inviting friends to church, quorum members seek out those who no longer attend. “In many ways, we are learning to be missionaries now,” he says.

“We often hear from these young men in testimony meeting,” the bishop says. “They often promise Coach Solomon that they will go on full-time missions.” Nothing would make their football coach happier. “I can’t wait for them to serve,” Solomon says.

Unity, gospel knowledge, and an orientation toward service—those are all part of a solid training regime for prospective missionaries. And in addition, these young men have already developed a great desire to work together to do good. Just like the football teams competing for the World Cup, they depend on each other, on their coaches, and on their fans (including ward members, families, and friends) to get them through to their “championship.” With that kind of team spirit, their goals will be achieved. ■

A Coach’s Conversion

Like many other young adults, football coach Solomon Eliya Tumane had questions about religion. “I wanted to know about God and why He asks us to pray, and about Jesus Christ and why He died for us. I was confused, but I was studying the scriptures, particularly the Old Testament.

“Then one day I was coming from work, and I saw two missionaries. I asked them the question about Jesus Christ. As they talked about Him, I could tell they loved Him. They

invited me to come to church, and when I did, I felt something inside telling me that this was what I had been looking for all those years.

“The missionaries taught me to pray and that it is important because it is our way to talk to Heavenly Father and to find the truth. I accepted what the missionaries taught me. I knew it was the true gospel, especially when we would read the scriptures together and pray about them.” ■